

# Department of Human Services

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## Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, March 5, 2008

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## 'Justice served' in conviction for killing toddler

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

**DARRYL Q. TUCKER**

**THE SAGINAW NEWS**

Anita Epperson says she believed Davario A. Barrera when he called her at home and told her he was not responsible for the March 2, 2007, murder of her 14-month-old nephew, Stacy Evans Jr.

For nearly a year, Epperson said she continued to believe Barrera because he was a friend to Evans' father, Stacy Evans Sr.

"He told me he had nothing to do with this," said Epperson, 42. "He denied it. We believed him."

On Monday, the belief in Barrera came to an end when a jury convicted Barrera, 19, of Saginaw of murder in the shooting death of the toddler, a year and a day after his slaying.

The verdict was a "relief, big relief," Epperson said.

"We're overwhelmed," she said. "I have no sympathy for him. Justice has been served."

The jury of six men and six women deliberated 4.5 hours over two days before finding Barrera guilty of first-degree murder of Evans Jr.; conspiring to commit murder; assault with intent to murder Barretta Epperson, 22; assault with intent to murder Joseph Ball, 20; carrying a concealed weapon; two counts of discharging a firearm from a motor vehicle; and six counts of possessing a firearm while committing a felony.

Saginaw County Circuit Judge Darnell Jackson has not set a sentencing date for Barrera, who likely will spend the rest of his life in prison without parole.

Barrera showed no emotion as the jury foreman read the guilty verdicts.

Defense attorney William R. Cowdry said he didn't agree with the verdict because there was no testimony that his client had a gun. "I'm disappointed, but the jury has spoken," he said.

Cowdry said the events that night wouldn't have occurred if a witness, whom The Saginaw News is not naming at the request of prosecutors, hadn't paid Jerry W. Long \$20 to drive the defendants around that night.

Prosecutors said Long drove his friends in his Hummer H3 during the two-hour shooting rampage: on Gallagher, where they shot at a 17-year-old Saginaw youth and Barrera was not involved; on Glenwood, where they shot at a group of men on a porch, and the men fired back; and then the incident at Norman and Outer Drive, where they shot and killed Evans.

Barrera was in the back seat of the Hummer when he told one of his co-defendants, Dequavious T. Johnson, also known as "Pootie," to shoot at a black 2000 Lincoln LS at Norman and Outer Drive in Buena Vista Township, prosecutors said. The Evans' and Ball were inside the Lincoln.

Authorities allege Barrera and his co-defendants were seeking revenge against a teen who scuffled with one of the defendants that day at Saginaw High School.

The other defendants, Johnson, 17; Jhirnea M. Harris, 17; and a 15-year-old will go to trial Tuesday, March 25. The 15-year-old faces charges as an adult, and The News is withholding his name.

On Thursday, Jackson will sentence Long, 24, of Saginaw to life behind bars for his conviction in the toddler's death. Long was the first of five defendants to go to trial and Barrera was second.

Meanwhile, Barrera will join his younger half-brother, Clarence W. Russell III, in prison.

Russell, 18, is serving a 12- to 52-year sentence for shooting Daniel D. Foster in Oct. 20, 2005, at Saginaw High School. A school video camera recorded the shooting of Foster, who was 15, during lunch hour in a stairwell at the school, 3100 Webber.

Russell pleaded guilty to shooting Foster in the chest with a stolen .38-caliber pistol at close range. v

Darryl Q. Tucker covers courts for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9686.

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# Conviction affirmed in son's death

Dowagiac Daily News

*Tuesday, March 4, 2008 10:14 AM EST*

ST. JOSEPH - The Michigan Court of Appeals Feb. 26 affirmed the conviction and sentence of Eric Jason Broglin for the first-degree felony murder of his son, 6-month-old Aidan Broglin.

Evidence at trial showed that on Jan. 26, 2007, while in the care of his father, Aidan sustained a subsequently fatal complex skull fracture with external trauma, severe brain injury, subdural hemorrhaging and retinal hemorrhaging.

Eric Broglin was sentenced to life imprisonment.

In affirming Broglin's conviction, the Court of Appeals concluded that the trial judge did not abuse his discretion by admitting two autopsy photographs.

The Court of Appeals also found no plain error requiring reversal based on the identification of jurors by numbers instead of by name.

Finally, the court did not find misconduct by the prosecutor or ineffective assistance by defense counsel.



## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Assorted drugs found in raid at Portage home

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

BY REX HALL JR.

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388-7784

PORTAGE -- Police said they found an assortment of illegal drugs Tuesday while raiding a house in Portage.

The Kalamazoo Valley Enforcement Team seized marijuana, crack cocaine, methamphetamine and a meth lab during the 3:30 p.m. search of the home, in the 1700 block of Quaker Avenue, a news release said. KVET went to the house after receiving an anonymous tip that drugs were being sold there, police said.

Police said they plan to seek several charges against a 33-year-old man who lives at the house, including operating a meth lab and possession of crack cocaine, marijuana and meth.

Two children, ages 4 and 12, who live in the house were not home at the time of the raid, the news release said. The Michigan Department of Human Services was notified.

Bicyclist hurt when hit

by minivan on U.S. 131

CONSTANTINE -- A bicyclist from Constantine was struck by a minivan this morning on U.S. 131 in St. Joseph County, police said.

Garret J. Eads, 25, was riding in the northbound lane when he was hit by the van at about 12:35 a.m., according to Michigan State Police.

Eads was taken to Borgess Medical Center in Kalamazoo for treatment of injuries that police said were not considered to be life-threatening.

The minivan's driver, 70-year-old Dean Hackenberg, of Roselle, Ill., and his wife were not injured, according to a news release.

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# **Michigan State Police seek assistance in locating missing teen**

Petoskey News-Review

Wednesday, March 5, 2008 9:48 AM EST

Troopers from the Petoskey Michigan State Police Post are asking for the public's help in locating a 17-year-old boy who walked away from his foster parents while at a restaurant in Bear Creek Township Sunday.

Police said Matthew James Bacon, of Kewadin, was dining with his foster parents at the China Buffet on U.S. 31 when he was last seen by employees at the restaurant. Matthew is a ward of the state until his 18th birthday on May 5.

Troopers said Matthew was last known to be wearing a blue shirt, baggy carpenter-style blue jeans, a tan knit cap and red and white low-cut tennis shoes. Matthew is described as a white male, 5-foot-11, 160 to 170 pounds with short brown hair in a brush-cut, and hazel eyes.

Police said Matthew had his wallet with him and may have had a small amount of money. Authorities said he is taking medication for depression and hyperactivity and he did not take any of the medication with him.

Police said Matthew is originally from this area and may have family or friends in the area. Troopers said they have made contact with all of his known acquaintances in the area to no avail.

Authorities ask anyone who has contact with Matthew or who may know his whereabouts to call 9-1-1.

# Mt. Morris, Mich. man pleads guilty to molesting numerous children

by Paul Janczewski | The Flint Journal

**Tuesday March 04, 2008, 3:45 PM**

A Mt. Morris man accused of molesting dozens of children over the past 20 years will plead guilty to a number of charges.

Kevin T. Odette, 34, will face a minimum of 25 years in prison when sentenced.

Odette, who faced at least 15 charges in three different courts, pleaded guilty today to six counts of first degree criminal sexual conduct with a victim under 13 years old; four counts of manufacturing child sexually abusive materials; two counts of using a computer to commit a crime; and one charge of second degree criminal sexual conduct.

Several other charges were dismissed by prosecutors in exchange for his plea.

"We did not want these juvenile victims to be forced to testify," said Assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Gladys Christopherson.

Attorney Mark W. Latchana, who represented Odette, echoed those statements.

He said Odette took the deal "to save those victims from reliving their experiences."

He also added that prosecutors had "overwhelming evidence" against Odette.

After Odette waived his preliminary examination and agreed to the plea deal, Central District Judge John L. Conover scheduled a March 17 circuit court arraignment.

Conover also was pleased that Odette accepted the deal, saying that decision saved the victims "a tremendous amount of heartache" if they had to take the stand and "relive this horrible experience."

Christopherson said part of the deal is that prosecutors will not seek new charges against Odette and take no position later whether they should make Odette serve his sentences consecutively or concurrently.

The cases involved boys and girls, aged 7-13, some elementary school aged and two of them teenagers. Officials said all the victims were known by Odette.

The cases began when a relative reported finding child pornography when Odette was moving from Vienna Township to Burton last year.

Investigators later found 75 VHS tapes and more than 200 DVDs and believe he could have molested as many as 75 children from the Gaylord, Lansing and Flint areas.

Police believe the sexual assaults occurred in Flint and Vienna townships during summer 2006.



Wednesday, March 5, 2008

## Adoptees: Unseal birth records

### Proposed bills would allow adults access to identity of birth parents.

**Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

Jerry Robertson always wanted to know who his birth parents were.

Born in 1945, Robertson was adopted during the first year that birth certificates of children adopted in Michigan were permanently sealed. That era ended in 1980, but it left thousands of people without access to their original birth certificates and clues to their ancestry.

Today Michigan lawmakers will begin contemplating one of the most heated questions within the adoption community -- should upwards of 20,000 people be allowed to access family information that has been kept secret for decades?

Bills in both chambers of the Legislature would allow people adopted between 1945 and 1980 to obtain their original birth certificate. It also would allow birth parents to tell the state whether they want to be contacted, and how. A hearing on the matter will be held today before the House Families and Children's Services subcommittee.

Robertson died in 1996 without knowing his family roots, but his daughter, Terri Koch, hopes a change in the law will allow her to fulfill his wish.

"It was excruciating and heart-wrenching and so unfair," said Koch, of Battle Creek, who continues the search for her father's birth parents. "He was the most caring person who ever lived but he was also the most tortured soul. I will never give up searching."

Opponents counter that the records should be kept secret to keep intact the parameters that were promised to birth mothers years ago.

They support opening the records but only if there is consent from both sides.

"The main concern is that the adoption was done at a different time, under certain rules that promised birth mothers confidentiality," said John VanValkenberg, spokesman for Bethany Christian Services, a Grand Rapids adoption agency with offices in 30 states.

"It's a balancing act," he said. "The rights of adoptees to have access (to their adoption records) is an important part in shaping their identity. We recognize those rights, but they must be balanced by the rights of the birth parents who were promised confidentiality."

#### Concerns now 'unfounded'

As society has become more accepting of childbirth outside of marriage and Internet tools have helped reunite families separated by adoption, a growing number of adoptees are pushing their states to open records to help them trace their genealogy.

Since 1996, six states have allowed adoptees access to their adoption records, including three states in 2007, according to Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in New York. Kansas and Alaska have never closed adoption records.

In November 2007, the Adoption Institute released a study examining reasons why some oppose releasing adoption information to adoptees once they become adults, such as concerns of violating the birth mother's anonymity, increased abortion rates and decreased adoption rates.

"The concerns that people had about allowing access simply are unfounded," said Adam Pertman, executive director of the institute. "The bottom line is, if adopted people want these birth certificates for some legitimate reason and there's no negative consequences, then why not do it?"

Michigan has allowed anyone adopted after Sept. 12, 1980, to acquire their original birth certificate when they become an adult, so long as there isn't a confidentiality request from their birth parents.

But those adopted between 1945 and 1980 only have access to a birth certificate with their adopted parents' names on it.

Original birth certificates cannot be released without a court order, according to Nanette Salyer, adoption inquiry specialist at the Michigan Department of Human Services.

That has prompted people such as Pamela Hewitt to try all kinds of strategies to find their birth parents. Hewitt is glad she found her birth mother in 2001, thanks to the Internet. But it took 26 years.

"There were a lot of dead ends and a lot of closed doors," said Hewitt, who lives north of Port Huron. "It was very, very sad."

#### Search program not enough

Michigan also changed its adoption law in 1980 to allow people adopted during the closed era to obtain nonidentifying information such as the birth parents' health history, ethnicity and educational background.

It also set up the Michigan Adoption Central Registry, a list of birth parents and siblings indicating whether they want to be contacted. Currently, 95 percent of the 26,311 people in the registry have indicated they would like identifying information to be released about them.

In 1996, Michigan established the Confidential Intermediary Program, which allows adoptees, birth parents and their family to petition the Family Court to appoint someone to search for relatives at a cost of \$250. The confidential intermediary obtains the adoption file, attempts to update the information and contacts the person to see if they wish to be contacted by the person who

petitioned the court.

"There's no guarantees you'll find someone," said Daryl Royal, a confidential intermediary in Wayne County, adding that the program is not well-known.

But many people adopted during the closed-record era say that is not enough.

"Michigan's adult adoptees who were adopted during the closed adoption era really require just one thing, and that is access to their original birth certificate," said Debby Fraser, 49, of Dearborn Heights, who was adopted in 1961 when she was 17 month old. "Being no less and no more than any other American citizen, and in keeping with the status quo that all nonadopted people have access to their birth records -- with logic and fairness -- our records should be opened to us."

*You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or [kkozlowski@detnews.com](mailto:kkozlowski@detnews.com).*

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## Mom helps out at Head Start

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

By Shannon Maynard

For the Citizen Patriot

When Leah Doherty's son, Parker, began attending Community Action Agency's Head Start program last fall, she knew she had to get involved.

"It's nice to have a say in what's going on rather than just sitting back and hoping for the best," the 23-year old said.

In September, Doherty joined the policy council. The council is made up of parents and serves as the governing body of Head Start. The group makes decisions on various issues, including the budget and the celebration policy.

"(Doherty) is an advocate for other parents," said Kristin Klug, children's program coordinator for Head Start.

"She's new to our policy council and she is unique in that she has the self-confidence to speak up for herself and others so quickly. Most parents have to grow into that."

In addition to serving on the policy council, Doherty helps in her son's classroom. She assists with the computer, helps students identify letters and in any other way extra hands are needed.

Over the past six months, Doherty has learned a great deal about what Head Start and Community Action do. She has also enjoyed watching her son interact with the other students.

"It's great to see my son growing up, playing with other kids and following the rules," she said.

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# THE BAY CITY TIMES

## Five sentenced in school bomb threats

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

**By Helen Lounsbury**

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WEST BRANCH - Five Ogemaw County children, ages 9-15, are learning the color of justice this week as they begin serving sentences for school bomb threats they made last fall.

Ogemaw Probate Judge Shana Lambourn sentenced the five during court hearings that began last week. Penalties vary with age, the oldest, in ninth grade, landing heavier sanctions.

All five children pleaded guilty in January to four-year felonies for making false bomb threats. The group, and at least one more student not yet caught, disrupted West Branch-Rose City Schools and their communities for two weeks last October.

Today the five face, without distinction, eight months probation, \$265 in fines and mental health counseling. Each child, too, must write an apology letter to their school and meet one-on-one with victims of traumatic events, Lambourn ordered.

Juvenile officers say the last requirement is designed to show kids what fear looks like in a person - the sort of fear that a bomb scare can provoke. Each student must also write an essay about what they learn from their session.

"The judge laid it all on the line during sentencing," Scott Williams, Ogemaw's assistant prosecutor, said Tuesday. "She emphasized the seriousness of what each one did and said 'This is your chance to keep your record clean. Take advantage of it.'"

Under Lambourn's order, each child must avoid trouble for eight months. If they do, their felony pleas revert to misdemeanors on their records. Authorities said they agreed to such leniency because none of the five had a juvenile history.

"They have a lot of incentive to stay out of trouble," Williams said.

The youngest offender, a third-grade boy, must also perform 15 hours of community service under Lambourn's order. The eldest, a 15-year-old girl, faces 50 hours. The other students, ages 10, 11 and 15, face 25-35 hours each.

Lambourn also ordered the four children who

have returned to school to participate in at least one extra-curricular event. One child, the ninth grade girl, remains expelled. She, by contrast, must follow an 8 p.m. curfew, undergo random urine and breath testing and enroll in a self-esteem program.

Finally, she and another ninth grade boy face 10 days in a detention home if they get into further trouble, Williams said. If not, the detention order drops.

West Branch-Rose City school officials, meanwhile, had no comment about students' criminal penalties. The district steered its own disciplinary course last fall, expelling all five students.

Today, most have returned to school, starting with the youngest in January, authorities said. The ninth-grade girl is eligible to return next September.

Board of Education members say their response has met with broad community support. The high school, too, has installed new hallway cameras, and staff members keep a tighter rein on who leaves class unsupervised and for how long.

"We sent a firm message to our student body that we won't tolerate it," Board of Education President, Cathy Zimmerman, said Tuesday. "We hope that's why the behavior stopped."

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# County allocates funding for Healthy Families initiative

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BY TERRY KATZ  
STURGIS JOURNAL

Published: Wednesday, March 5, 2008 8:13 AM CST

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CENTREVILLE - A county allocation of \$42,000 to support critical services for children at risk has been awarded to the St. Joseph County Human Services Commission.

The money will be used by Healthy Families, a collaborative initiative.

Jan Reed, HSC collaborative coordinator, told county commissioners Tuesday that it's a "crown jewel program." Last year, the money provided services to 1,018 area families.

"This program provides ... in-home workers for families who are deemed at risk for abuse and child neglect," Reed said. "In particular we work with young mothers."

Commissioner Monte Bordner, chairman of the St. Joseph County Human Services Commission, said those services are "essential to assisting many of our families," with Branch/Hillsdale/St. Joseph Community Health, the Intermediate School District, Community Mental Health and others working together "to give our youngest citizens and their families the help they need to have a successful start."

The money was part of the Waste Management Fund budget for possible allocation to the Human Services Commission provided HSC would explain how it would be used.



## Muskegon Chronicle

### Grant targets Nelson residents' health

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

By Jeff Alexander

[jalexander@muskegonchronicle.com](mailto:jalexander@muskegonchronicle.com)

MUSKEGON -- Two local agencies are teaming up to help residents of Muskegon's Nelson Neighborhood lead healthier lives by encouraging them to eat better foods and exercise more often.

The Muskegon County Health Department has received a \$20,000 state grant to work with the Nelson Neighborhood Improvement Association on the project.

"We're trying to figure out how we can get more people in the Nelson Neighborhood involved in some sort of physical activity," said Ken Kraus, director of the county health department.

"The issue is how do we make it easier for people to be more physically active and eat more nutritional food."

Nelson Neighborhood residents aren't necessarily in worse physical condition than people in other parts of the city, Kraus said. He said the county chose the downtown Muskegon neighborhood because it has a high poverty rate and an active neighborhood association; poverty is a major contributor to obesity and an array of serious health problems it causes.

Kraus said the county figured it could do more with the limited amount of money the state awarded because the Nelson Neighborhood Improvement Association was already working on programs that encourage healthy living.

The health department conducted an assessment of the Nelson Neighborhood to determine what types of things would help residents lead healthier lives. The number one need: A downtown grocery store, said Dan Rinsema-Sybenga, a board member of the Nelson Neighborhood Improvement Association.

"Access to a grocery store with healthy foods is the biggest thing," Rinsema-Sybenga said.

Downtown Muskegon has been without a grocery store for several years. Grocery stores nearest the Nelson Neighborhood, which encompasses much of downtown Muskegon, are Plumb's, on Apple Avenue, and Meijer in Norton Shores.

Rinsema-Sybenga said the neighborhood association also might make a push for bike lanes on some downtown streets and development of a community garden where residents could grow and harvest vegetables.

He said the group would also explore ways to encourage more people to use the Lakeshore Trail for walking and biking.

"There are a lot of efforts under way," Rinsema-Sybenga said. "This is a way to bring many of those efforts together under one umbrella."

One of the biggest challenges in lower-income neighborhoods is creating a "mind set for healthy living." That can start with getting people to do something as simple as picking up litter in their neighborhood, Rinsema-Sybenga said.

# WSU set to begin layoffs at medical school next week

## Payment dispute lingers with DMC

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT • FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER • March 5, 2008

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Wayne State University's School of Medicine is moving ahead with layoffs, the first of which are likely to be announced next week, because money issues over physician pay with its longtime partner, the Detroit Medical Center, have not been resolved, two members of the WSU leadership team said Tuesday.

### ADVERTISEMENT

Kenneth Lee, associate dean of finance and administrator at the medical school, said layoffs will be made one department at a time, over 2 to 2 1/2 weeks.

"Nobody's writing any checks; nothing's going to change that," Lee said.

WSU medical leaders said that resolutions passed last Thursday by the DMC board either did not address key issues in the dispute or attached so many conditions that compromise is not possible for now.

Both DMC and WSU officials are to meet Thursday with David Fink, the Rochester attorney named by Gov. Jennifer Granholm to mediate the dispute between the two organizations.

The dispute began Feb. 1 when the DMC delivered a letter to WSU saying that effective Feb. 11, it would withhold the first of \$1 million in monthly payments to WSU, totaling \$12 million of \$19 million the medical center gives WSU for care of uninsured and underinsured patients.

The medical school wants the DMC to put the disputed funds into an interest-bearing escrow account.

The DMC board vote neglected to even mention that issue, said Dr. Valerie Parisi, vice dean, hospital relations and clinical affairs at the medical school.

The DMC has agreed to pay for half of the salary of an outside expert to evaluate whether DMC has paid too much to WSU doctors to care for the poor, but WSU so far has balked at conditions that all information given the consultant by either party be shared with both sides in the debate, Parisi said.

Steve D'Arcy, chairman of the DMC board, had no comment Tuesday.

Contact **PATRICIA ANSTETT** at 313-222-5021 or [panstett@freepress.com](mailto:panstett@freepress.com).

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LOCAL COMMENT | DETROIT MEDICAL CENTER

# Cuts would damage safety net

BY DANIEL B. MICHAEL • March 5, 2008

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When the ground underfoot is continually quaking, it's only human nature to seek a more stable place to stand.

ADVERTISEMENT

Physicians of the Wayne State University School of Medicine continue to be shaken by a recent series of disputes with the school's longtime partner in health care, the Detroit Medical Center.

When the DMC recently announced the withholding of \$10 million to \$12 million in state and federal dollars from WSU physicians who treat indigent patients in Detroit -- money the School of Medicine already has budgeted -- it created a ripple effect that is often unseen, but certainly will be felt, by the general public.

We fear the consequences may begin to unravel the already fragile health care safety net in Detroit, leaving the city's most vulnerable patients without access to the physicians they need, and affecting Michigan's entire health care system.

Consider these facts:

- WSU physicians and resident physicians provide 80% of the care for Medicaid patients and the working poor in Detroit. Physicians at Wayne State agreed to take on the responsibility of caring for indigent patients in partnership with the DMC with the expectation of reimbursement as negotiated.
- WSU physicians are dedicated to the Wayne State University School of Medicine, which is ranked among the top 20% of medical schools nationally. About 60% of WSU's medical school graduates stay in Michigan. Nearly every county in Michigan has a Wayne State graduate practicing there.
- We already are facing a shortage of physicians in Michigan. DMC's reimbursement cuts will exacerbate the problem. It's hard enough to recruit top physician educators without this added trauma.
- Any one of the excellent physicians at Wayne State would have an easier and more financially rewarding practice somewhere else. Most physicians have spouses and children and mortgages and medical school debt to consider. If the family as a whole feels uncertain, the physician may seek a more stable place to practice.
- Physicians of the Wayne State University School of Medicine are committed to the care of patients in Detroit who are uninsured and underinsured. The accusation from the DMC that they are overcompensated for this work does not seem credible. It seems unwise for a hospital board and administration to break an agreement and consciously or unconsciously upset one of their most important constituencies, the physicians who actually provide the care to the hospital's patients.

We are encouraged by recent media reports about the hiring of an independent mediator, and we hope for a swift settlement of this dispute.

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Cuts+would+damage+safety+net&expire=&...> 3/5/2008

Cascading events will erode health care not just for the indigent of Detroit, but also for everyone in Michigan.

In the meantime, it seems reasonable to expect the DMC to continue to make payments to Wayne State as negotiated to keep the School of Medicine operating as budgeted and the health care safety net intact.

A stable relationship between the DMC and the WSU School of Medicine is critical to the health of all Michigan citizens.

**DANIEL B. MICHAEL, MD, PhD**, is a Detroit neurosurgeon, chair of the Wayne County Medical Society Board of Trustees and speaker of the Michigan State Medical Society House of Delegates. Write to him at [msms@msms.org](mailto:msms@msms.org).

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TOM WALSH

## Gravity of WSU-DMC fight obscured by text furor

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BY TOM WALSH • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • MARCH 5, 2008

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If the magnitude of Detroit's mayoral mess weren't sucking up all the air in town, another unfolding Detroit tragedy would be getting a lot more attention.

And it should.

Two of this beleaguered city's most important institutions -- the Detroit Medical Center and Wayne State University -- have been sniping at each other for about two years. This past month, the ill will between DMC and WSU's School of Medicine has turned nasty, with the two sides exchanging insults and threatening letters from each other's lawyers, as they fight over money and turf. While both sides piously proclaim to be major providers of uncompensated care to the region's poor and uninsured, the reality is that the reputations and future viability of both the DMC and Wayne's med school are being badly damaged by this feud. Meanwhile, staff layoffs are looming and hundreds of thousands of dollars have been shelled out to litigate and mediate the disputes. So, how to end it?

First, dial down the emotion and the rhetoric.

"There is a lack of collaborative spirit here," Eugene Driker, chair of WSU's Board of Governors complained to the Free Press editorial board last week. He called the DMC's action to withhold \$1 million a month in disputed fees from WSU physicians "a giant thumb in the eye of the university."

Translation: Mike Duggan, CEO of the DMC, southeast Michigan's largest hospital system, is driving Driker and others at WSU crazy.

Duggan, a self-described pit bull in earlier jobs as Wayne County prosecutor and deputy county executive, takes a head-on approach to problem resolution.

Is Duggan always right? Maybe not, but he's definitely a guy you want on your side, not the other side, if things come to blows. But we don't want this to come to blows, certainly not while Wayne State is trying to recruit a successor for outgoing President Irvin Reid.

So, if key players can't seem to get along, how about putting some other good heads on the problem?

That, it turns out, is what the WSU board is now recommending. In a meeting by telephone Monday, the board -- in a split vote -- decided to create a working committee of WSU board members to meet with a similar group from the DMC board to try to hash out their differences.

Steve D'Arcy, a PricewaterhouseCoopers partner and DMC board chairman, told me Tuesday that he had heard about the vote and would welcome such a meeting. "This is good news," he said, but added that he had not yet received a formal communication from Driker about arranging such a meeting. "We would like to do it sooner rather than later," he said.

Tension has flared several times in recent years between the nine-hospital DMC system and Wayne State, which has the largest single-campus medical school in the nation, with more than 1,000 students.

The two institutions have a long history of training doctors together and providing care to the indigent, but both also face the pressures of population migrating from city to suburbs.

The DMC hasn't liked WSU's moves to forge alliances with suburban hospitals such as Dearborn's Oakwood and Rochester's Crittenton.

Conversely, WSU objected last year to DMC competing for the right to host one of two Detroit-area campuses for Michigan State University's College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Dr. Robert Mentzer Jr., dean of the WSU medical school, said Tuesday that the DMC has shown in many meetings over the past few years that it has "very little regard for the medical school."

Regarding the WSU board's Monday vote to form a working committee to meet with counterparts from the DMC board, Mentzer said, "Apparently we have some well-meaning people who want to talk some more."

Talking about tough, complex issues can be frustrating. Talking with certain people can be exasperating.

But if medical care, research and education are ever to fulfill their promise as an economic growth engine in metro Detroit, that means that the DMC, Wayne State's med school and other institutions need to pull together. No matter how long they need to keep talking to make it happen.

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## Free tax service available for eligible households

Gladwin County Record

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GLADWIN COUNTY -- Many low and moderate income households are eligible for free income tax preparation as well as the Earned Income Tax Credit which may increase their refund by as much as \$4,500.

The services are provided by IRS certified Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) providers.

The VITA program is an IRS program aimed at providing free tax assistance to low to moderate income families.

Partnering agencies such as Mid Michigan Community Action, Department of Human Services, Commission on Aging and others will host the VITA site.

The service includes state and federal income taxes, as well as many state and federal tax credits. For example, the Earned Income Tax Credit credited more than 680,000 Michigan families with more than \$1.29 billion in tax year 2006. The problem is that many families do not know that they are eligible, so they never file.

The free tax preparation service will make sure that families file for all of the credits they are eligible to receive. Individuals making up to \$20,000 and families making up to \$37,000 are eligible for the service.

Interested individuals, families and seniors should contact Gladwin County's Department of Human Services office at 989-426-5731 for tax preparation sites within their county.

Mid Michigan Community Action Agency is a non-profit, human services agency serving Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola Counties since 1966.

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